

Postcards from Iraq

Helping the Iraqi people get the simplest things we all take for granted

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I really started my journey here 30 years ago. When I joined the Corps of Engineers in the 1970's the people in the field carried slide rules. I can remember seeing my first engineering calculator and also my first computer in a Corps of Engineer office. Anyway I wanted to go overseas then. There was this big build up in Saudi Arabia and the Corps of Engineers was involved in that build up. Each time I asked about applying for a position back then, I was always told not now, later.

Well when later came, the Corps had completed their mission in Saudi. So my life moved on and my career lengthened. A friend of the family came over here during the first phase of the reconstruction and while home on R&R he visited our home in Southern Illinois and we, his wife and my wife sat around the living room and talked about the work going on over here.

When they departed my wife looked at me and said you really want to go over there don't you? Since I do not lie to the best friend I have, I told her yes. As she walked away she said, "Well, I guess you better go and get it out of your system." When I brought up the subject to my supervisor, he told me that if I finished the project that I was working on that he did not see a problem with me going. When I got here in September 05, things were not exactly how I had seen in the brochure.

But my biggest problem was family. For the first couple of weeks, I could not call home. Not that I could not use a phone and call home, I just could not talk to my family. I just sent emails. The first couple of times we talked, it was really bad. To hear their voices, my wife had set up a speaker phone so all could talk. My daughters are in college so you can say my family is grown and my wife and I have been married for nearly 25 years. Still yet it was very hard. But once you get into the groove here and working the long hours you become sort of challenged with all the work.

My first tour I had projects outside the wire and traveling with the military —you can see everything up close. You see the infrastructure that is so bad that it just does not work anymore and that the people do not have the simplest of services. After I returned home from my first tour, my family and I went out to dinner and when the waitress came to our table with a glass of water with ice in it, my mind flashed back to Iraq and I started thinking about drinking water ...that you can go to just about any place in the United States and get a drink of safe drinking water.

Life does not get any simpler than that. And I started thinking about coming back ... then coming back again and I guess I am still trying to help the Iraqi people get the simplest things that we all take for granted.

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